

## BackTalk

# I.O.C. Should Reject China for 2008

By TOM LANTOS

On Friday, delegates of the International Olympic Committee will assemble in Moscow to vote to determine which city — Toronto, Paris or Beijing — will have the privilege of being host to the 2008 Summer Games. China's leaders have argued that politics should not taint the delegates' deliberations and that each finalist should be subject only to technical review to determine which city has the best sports facilities, transportation systems, hotels and other material resources needed to carry out a successful Olympics.

But turning a blind eye to the egregious human rights violations taking place every day in China does not remove politics from the Olympics — it permits an authoritarian regime to exploit the Games to prop up its faltering legitimacy by gaining an important symbol of acceptance from the international community. The I.O.C. should reject China's bid and protect the Olympic ideal.

The Olympics are first and foremost about sports — athletes from around the world uniting in their love of the game and their commitment to free and fair competition. But human rights and human dignity are also central to the spirit of the Olympics. The Olympic

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charter makes clear that "Olympism" includes "respect for universal fundamental ethical principles" and the "preservation of human dignity."

Awarding the Games to Beijing will not contribute to peace or human dignity. In February, the I.O.C. evaluation committee got a preview of the heavy-handed tactics that the Chinese government will use to stage-manage the Olympics. During the visit, The New York Times reported that Chinese officials placed known critics of the government and their families under more surveillance and warned them not to speak out while inspectors from the I.O.C. were visiting. The government also detained vagrants and street children to keep them out of sight of the evaluation committee. In a separate event related to China's Olympic bid, the mayor of Beijing, Liu Qi, informed a rally in the city that in preparation for the Games the government would, as reported last September in The Age of Melbourne, Australia, "resolutely smash and crack down on Falun Gong and other evil cults."

Desperate to win international approval, Chinese authorities argue that the human rights situation in China is improving. But the State Department's annual

human rights report concluded just the opposite, stating that during the past year the Chinese government's record "worsened" as it committed "numerous serious abuses," from raiding churches, to jailing Internet entrepreneurs, to silencing democratic activists, to cracking down on the Falun Gong.

Beijing's behavior last April only confirmed this conclusion. In detaining 24 crew members of an American military plane for 10 days, the Chinese flouted all diplomatic protocols and norms of international behavior. Americans gained valuable insight into the true nature of the regime during this time. It reminded us that a government that routinely violates the human rights of its citizens naturally treats foreigners with the same disrespect. Can we expect the same abuse when tens of thousands of athletes and fans descend on Beijing for the 2008 Games?

During the 1930's, Olympic officials faced a similar decision: should they overlook Nazi Germany's human rights abuses and grant the resurgent economic power its bid for the 1936 Games? They did, and the 1936 Olympics were exploited to maximum effect by Hitler, who put on a dazzling show designed to fool other countries into believing that Nazi Germany was a model world citizen. Headlines from The New York Times of Aug. 16, 1936, tell it all: "Olympics leave glow of pride in the Reich," "A piece of perfect German pageantry" and "Germans themselves seem to have taken lessons to heart and visitors gain a good impression." The rest is history we dare not forget.

I look forward to the day when we can all support a proposal for China to be host to the Olympic Games at a time when the Chinese people openly enjoy the tolerance and freedoms espoused by the high ideals of the Olympic tradition. China is one of the world's great civilizations, rich in history and culture. Its people are among the most dynamic, its athletes among the most talented. But, unfortunately, its government is among the most tyrannical. China should earn the Games not because of its ability to build world-class sports sites and manage a massive event, but by virtue of its commitment to upholding the Olympic ideal.

The I.O.C. delegates have a responsibility that is spelled out in the Olympic charter to "oppose any political or commercial abuse of sport and athletes" and "place sport at the service of humanity." A vote by the delegates in favor of Beijing would abrogate these critical I.O.C. responsibilities by allowing a brutal authoritarian regime to bask in the reflected glory of the Olympics.

That's why I've joined Rep. Christopher Cox, a California Republican, in sponsoring a resolution addressed to the I.O.C. expressing the view of Congress that the Olympic Games in the year 2008 should not be held in Beijing. This resolution was overwhelmingly approved by the House International Relations Committee on a strong bipartisan vote, and can be brought up any time for a vote in the full House of Representatives. I call on the Republican leadership of the House to schedule a vote on the Lantos-Cox resolution before the I.O.C. votes on Friday.

In service of the Olympic ideal, I sincerely hope that the I.O.C. will reject China's bid to hold the Games.

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